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ABSTRACT

Australia's National Indigenous Literacy and Numeracy Strategy acknowledges that extra effort and resources will be required for Indigenous Australian children to achieve the recently enacted national educational goals. The principal objective of the strategy is to achieve English literacy and numeracy for Indigenous students at levels comparable to those achieved by other young Australians. Implementation will be carried out by developing greater self-esteem in Indigenous students; increasing parent and community involvement; targeted initiatives; coordinating government agencies' actions; development of cooperative plans by Commonwealth, state, territorial, and local governments; development with education providers of Indigenous literacy, numeracy, and attendance implementation plans; and appropriate funding. The bulk of this document discusses six key elements: lifting school attendance rates of Indigenous students to national levels; addressing hearing and other health problems that undermine learning for many Indigenous students; providing preschooling opportunities; training teachers in the skills and cultural awareness necessary to be effective in Indigenous communities and schools and encouraging them to remain for reasonable periods of time; ensuring that the most effective teaching methods are employed; and instituting measures of success as a basis of accountability for schools and teachers. Specific initiatives are described for each element. Appendices contain Australia's national educational goals and the national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander goals. (TD)

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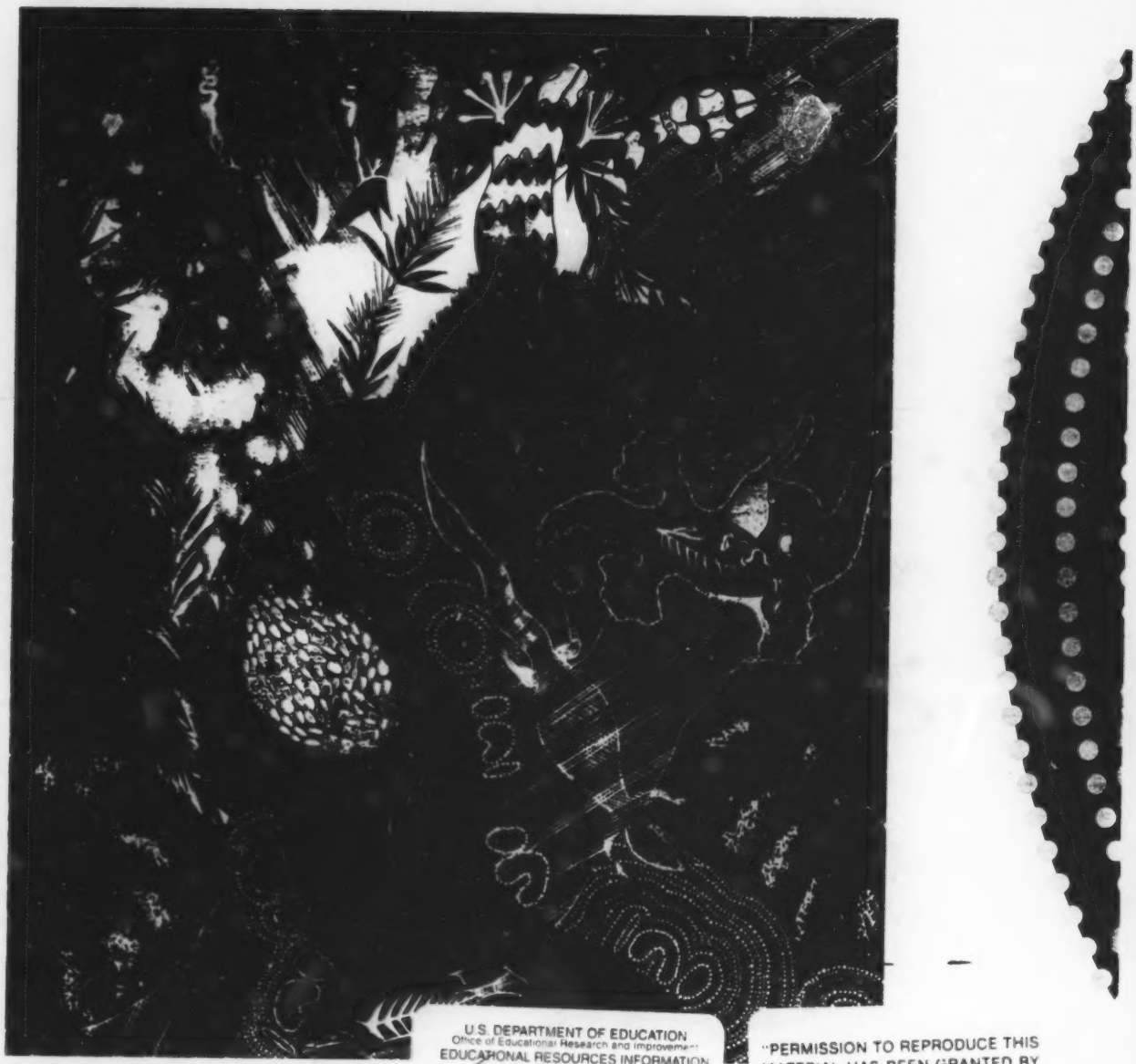
ED 449 925

National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy

S T R A T E G Y

2000-2004



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National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy

S T R A T E G Y

2000-2004

An initiative of the Commonwealth Government of Australia
March 2000

Artist name: *Dale R. Huddleston (Ngandi people, Roper River, NT; Wiradjuri people, Central Western NSW)*

Title: *Spirit Figures*

Spirit Figures talks about the food chain - saltwater, freshwater and bush tucker. It also details the disappearance of our food sources - represented by the transparent animal figures.

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Introduction

From the Minister, the Honourable Dr David Kemp MP

Commonwealth Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs

All young Australians are entitled to equal educational opportunity. Until Indigenous Australians can choose from the same range of futures as other Australians, we are not achieving our nation's promise as a democratic society.

Seven out of every ten Indigenous students in Year 3 are below the national literacy standard, compared to just three out of ten for other Australians. On average, Indigenous students miss out on up to one day of schooling every week, compared to around just three days every term for other Australian students. This means Indigenous students are, on average, missing out on more than a year of primary school and more than a year of secondary school. It is not surprising then that some 18% of Australia's 'at risk' youth are Indigenous. Improving the educational opportunities and achievements of Indigenous Australians is an urgent national priority.

The Commonwealth Government is committed to working with Indigenous families, communities, States, Territories and education providers to overcome the educational disadvantages that Indigenous children face.

As Commonwealth Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs, I am personally committed to adding my energies and effort to this vital task.

All State and Territory Ministers for education, as well as the Commonwealth, have endorsed the National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century. We have agreed that all children leaving primary school should be numerate, able to read, write and spell at an appropriate level and that every child commencing school from 1998 will achieve a minimum acceptable literacy and numeracy standard within four years. This Strategy is part of that commitment. It acknowledges that for Indigenous Australian children we need to put in extra effort, resources and will to achieve our goals.

This means ensuring all Indigenous Australian children can competently speak and understand Australian Standard English and have the numeracy skills to manage their lives. This should not be at the expense of Indigenous communities' desires to use their own languages, or to revitalise or regain languages that may have been threatened. To achieve this goal, school must be a place where all Indigenous Australian children want to be, and want to learn.

Education for Indigenous children must provide them with the opportunities, knowledge and skills to drive their own futures, without forcing them to abandon their culture, or their family and community life. We know that students will not build their literacy and numeracy skills unless school is a welcoming and inclusive place, students are healthy enough to take

advantage of the opportunities given, and they are encouraged by their parents and others to go to school.

Too many Indigenous students do not attend school regularly enough to gain the full value of the learning that is on offer. This Strategy focuses on nurturing strong partnerships within local communities to create a sense of real purpose for Indigenous children attending school.

Since 1996, the Commonwealth Government has introduced a range of reforms to improve the educational achievements of Indigenous students. Through the introduction of national benchmarks, we have increased the information available to schools, parents and communities on what is being achieved by education departments and schools. Commonwealth funding is focused on supporting literacy and numeracy skills development. Practical improvements for Indigenous students have been encouraged through performance-based funding under the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme.

We have made the Aboriginal Study Assistance Scheme (ABSTUDY) fairer and more sustainable, to ensure Indigenous students have the income support to continue their education. We have begun a review of tutorial assistance, parent awareness and student support arrangements under the Indigenous Education Direct Assistance Programme. Our aim is to focus more sharply on literacy and numeracy skills and to increase student attendance levels. In 1998 and 1999, we put extensive resources into a wide range of Strategic Results Projects and as a result, we now have many examples of effective teaching practice that accelerate Indigenous students' learning.

The National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy will extend across preschool and school systems. Education providers will be encouraged to adopt approaches to teaching that have been shown to make a real difference. There will be extensive resources available for the education of all Australian children through State, Territory and Commonwealth recurrent funding programmes. Specific supplementary funding arrangements designed to support improved educational outcomes for Indigenous students will also be available. This Strategy will heighten awareness of Indigenous literacy and numeracy issues and accelerate implementation of successful teaching practices.

The Strategy will build on the wide range of initiatives already being implemented by State, Territory and non-government providers of education. The Strategy has been developed after consideration of issues raised by many of those providers and a broad range of Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators and community representatives.

Indigenous children will have the opportunity to achieve the literacy and numeracy skills they need to equip them for life. They will benefit from their parents and communities working with schools and sharing a commitment to learning. I hope all those involved in educating our nation's children will add their energies to achieving the goals of this Strategy.

DAVID KEMP
Commonwealth Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs

Overview

The Strategy

The objective of the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy is to **achieve English literacy and numeracy for Indigenous students at levels comparable to those achieved by other young Australians.**

This objective will be achieved by education providers making more effective use of the significant resources available under State, Territory and Commonwealth education funding programs, to implement the following **six key elements**:

- lifting ***school attendance*** rates of Indigenous students to national levels;
- effectively ***addressing the hearing and other health problems*** that undermine learning for a large proportion of Indigenous students;
- providing, wherever possible, *preschooling opportunities*;
- training sufficient numbers of ***teachers*** in the skills and cultural awareness necessary to be effective in Indigenous communities and schools and encouraging them to remain for reasonable periods of time;
- ensuring that ***teaching methods*** known to be most effective are employed; and
- instituting transparent ***measures of success*** as a basis for ***accountability*** for schools and teachers.

Implementation of these six key elements of the Strategy will be carried out by:

- developing greater self-esteem in Indigenous students;
- mobilising the active engagement of parents and communities through national and local Indigenous leadership and partnerships;
- targeted initiatives;
- co-ordinated program implementation by relevant Commonwealth Departments;
- the development of co-operative plans by Commonwealth, State and Territory and local governments and communities;
- the development with education providers of Indigenous literacy, numeracy and attendance implementation plans; and
- appropriate funding commitments.

Crucial to success will be:

- raising the expectations of parents, teachers and the community about the literacy and numeracy levels which can be achieved by Indigenous students;
- achieving a commitment to success by principals and teachers both in Indigenous community and mainstream schools;
- active management of local level attendance and learning strategies for students at risk;
- providing adequate opportunities for community leadership and action; and
- building upon the results of a national program of strategic projects for Indigenous students carried out during 1998 and 1999.

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Commonwealth and State Ministers of Education have agreed that every student leaving primary school should be able to read, write, spell and communicate at an adequate level. National standards have been agreed for reading, writing and spelling at Years 3 and 5. The National Literacy Plan commenced in 1998 and major initiatives have been taken in every State and Territory under that Plan. This Strategy provides an important new element of the Plan to secure educational equality for the most disadvantaged group of students.

Key Initiatives

Implementation of the **National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy** will require the development with the States, Territories and Indigenous communities of a wide range of specific plans and initiatives.

The following list indicates the kinds of plans and initiatives through which the objectives of the Strategy will be achieved.

Getting Students to School Regularly

- Indigenous Home/School liaison officers whose job is to support families to get their children to school;
- co-operative strategies between parents, school authorities and police to re-engage absent students with school activities;
- improved mechanisms for reporting attendance and performance levels to parents;
- enforcement of tightened attendance requirements for payment of ABSTUDY benefits, including a requirement for action plans to resolve recurrent non-attendance issues;
- nutrition interventions such as breakfast, snack and/or lunch programs, as appropriate;
- an invitation to communities to develop and invoke community mandated penalties for consistent unexplained school absences and rewards for good attendance;
- flexible school time-tables and structures which fit better with students' and community needs; and
- promotion of strong educational roles for Indigenous Education Workers.

Getting Healthy

- Improved co-operation between health agencies and education providers to support hearing assessments and interventions;
- additional funding for nutrition programmes in schools; and
- provision of physical aids in classrooms to assist students with hearing deficiencies.

Providing a Reason to Stay On at School

- Contracts with business enterprises and associations to deliver structured work-place learning opportunities;
- development of culturally inclusive school programs;
- student mentoring by Indigenous Elders and community leaders; and
- personal counselling for students experiencing out-of-school difficulties, which are interfering with their education.

Building Stronger Partnerships

- Local implementation plans negotiated with communities and education providers;
- implementation agreements between the Commonwealth, States and Territories;
- specific initiatives for pilot communities negotiated with schools, parents and students in those communities;
- community Education Trusts to buy in and manage education arrangements; and
- engagement of groups such as the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation to build support in communities for Education Agreements.

Community and Business Leadership

- National and locally recognised Indigenous ambassadors to promote school attendance and literacy and numeracy achievement for young Indigenous people;
- business partnerships to provide employment opportunities for skilled students developed with the assistance of local enterprises, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and other business associations as appropriate;
- performance measures and accountability arrangements; and
- specific identification of agencies with responsibility for actively managing the implementation process at the local level.

Skilling Up Parents

- Development of training programs to assist parents to support their child's learning through refocussing the Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) programme on issues such as adult literacy and home-based support; and
- negotiation of ASSPA spending priorities as part of local agreements with parents and communities.

Delivering Better Support for Students

- Development of homework centres and extended tutoring arrangements to support students out of school hours;
- establishment of student tracking and support systems to integrate community mobility norms with the educational needs of students; and
- establishment of 'visiting classrooms' and electronic student portfolios for mobile students.

Quality Education – through Quality Teaching

- Collaborative plans with the States and Territories to lift pre-school participation to national levels;
- development of a preschool student development profile to guide parents and teachers about school readiness;
- documentation of current university best-practice in using Indigenous Studies in teacher training;
- improved teacher selection practices and enhanced incentives for teachers to remain for a satisfactory period with communities; and
- appropriate professional development for teachers through the Quality Teaching Programme.

Principals' Leading

- Effective engagement of school principals as leaders in the task of achieving improved Indigenous educational outcomes through the Australian Principals' Associations Professional Development Council;
- dissemination of the results of the survey conducted by the Australian Primary Principals Association on barriers, issues and approaches to Indigenous students' educational success; and
- support for the implementation of literacy and numeracy teaching methods with proven effectiveness.

The need for a national strategy

Achieving educational equality for Indigenous young people requires a co-ordinated national approach, which addresses all the requirements of educational success.

A national strategy is required in order to achieve the greatest impact from the policies and resources available to each level of government and in each community. A national strategy does not imply identical action in every community. The community and parental commitment essential to success means that a diversity of approaches is needed to suit the needs of different circumstances. However, a national strategy will involve co-ordinated action within the Commonwealth government across relevant portfolios, co-operative action between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories which have primary responsibility for schooling, and the effective involvement of local communities, schools, parents and students.

A special Indigenous strategy to supplement the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan is required because many young Indigenous Australians have multiple disadvantages that, unless addressed, undermine their success at school. Up until now, these disadvantages have prevented a majority of Indigenous students reaching the literacy and numeracy levels they require in order to be fully participating citizens in the wider Australian society. This is an unacceptable situation, and this Strategy is designed to end it.

Indigenous Students

The preliminary enrolment estimates for 1999 indicate there were just over 116,000 Indigenous young people in Australian preschools and schools. This is compared to the over 140,000 estimated Indigenous Australians in the 3 to 18 years of age group, at the last census. There are several thousand Indigenous teenagers in TAFE and other structured training programs that can be added to the school student numbers.

These young people were principally located in Queensland (32,600); New South Wales (31,800); Western Australia (19,000); the Northern Territory (14,400); South Australia (6,900); Victoria (5,600); Tasmania (4,600) and the Australian Capital Territory (860).

Of these students, some 9,700 were in preschools; 72,800 were in primary schools; 27,200 in junior secondary schools; and 6,100 in senior secondary school.

There were some 13,700 students enrolled in non-government sector preschools and schools, representing almost 12% of total students.

Indigenous school enrolments increased by around 40% from 1991 to 1998. Enrolments in vocational education and training have almost doubled from 1994 to 1998 and enrolments in higher education have increased by about 60% from 1991 to 1998.

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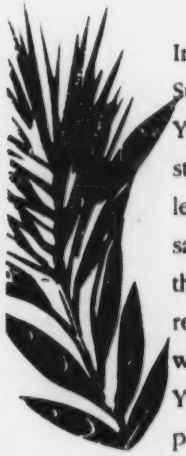
Despite this strong growth, there are still a number of barriers that many Indigenous Australians and educators struggle to overcome. The Commonwealth has attempted to identify these barriers through research and by working with Indigenous community leaders, educators, and State and Territory education systems. It has funded numerous Strategic Results Projects to find ways in which improvements can be made.

While access and participation rates are improving, equitable educational outcomes are still a long way from being achieved.



In the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey, approximately 70% of students in Year 3 met the identified performance standards in reading and writing. However, less than 20% of students in the Indigenous sample met the reading standards and less than 30% met the writing standards. Similar results were obtained for Year 5 students, which suggests that the lowest achieving Year 3 Indigenous students make little or no progress over the following two years.

In 1998, 83% of Indigenous students remained in school to Year 10, but only 32% to Year 12, compared to 73% of non-Indigenous students. In many remote communities, in order to attend school, secondary school students have to travel to major centres. Nationally, the Year 12 retention rate of Indigenous students stays at less than half that of other students.

Additionally, in some parts of the country in 1997, while only 30% of Indigenous students remained in school to Year 12, only a quarter of those students successfully completed Year 12, compared to 50% of non-Indigenous Year 12 students.

Indigenous students, 15 years and over, are less likely to achieve a post-school qualification with currency in the labour market. While this level has increased from 10% in 1991 to 14% in 1996, there is considerable room for improvement, considering that 34% of Australia's total population had such a qualification in 1996.

There is a close relationship between low levels of education and:

- poor health problems;
- overcrowded housing;
- poor access to public services; and
- low levels of family involvement in education.

Improvements in any or all of these areas will improve educational outcomes.

The links with reconciliation

Achieving reconciliation between Indigenous and other Australians requires equal opportunities for, and mutual recognition of the dignity of all Australians. To be able to effectively participate in Australia's business, political and social life, Indigenous students need the full range of skills that schooling can provide and the self-esteem to equip them to compete.

It is vital that increased efforts are made over the next several years to remove the educational disadvantages that Indigenous students face, so that they can be more involved in, and benefit more from, the opportunities this country has to offer.

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Objective

To achieve English literacy, numeracy and attendance outcomes for Indigenous students at levels comparable to those achieved by other Australians.

This Strategy has a clear objective: securing literacy and numeracy levels for Indigenous students comparable to those of other young Australians. The Strategy brings together communities, States, Territories and the Commonwealth to achieve this goal.

Achieving this objective is an essential aspect of realising the national literacy and numeracy goals as well as the National Goals for Schooling in Australia in the Twenty-First Century (to which all State and Territory Ministers for education have committed). It will deliver on the promise of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy to achieve 'equitable and appropriate educational outcomes' for Indigenous Australians.

It is important to keep these agreed goals clear and at the forefront of efforts to implement the Strategy.

National Literacy and Numeracy Goals

In March 1997, Education Ministers agreed on a National Goal:

> ***"...that every child leaving primary school should be numerate, and able to read, write and spell at an appropriate*** level..."

and that:

> ***"...every child commencing school from 1998 will achieve a minimum acceptable literacy and numeracy standard within four years."***

National Goals for Schooling in Australia in the Twenty-First Century

In April 1999, all Education Ministers made an historic commitment to collaborate on improving Australian schooling. The National Goals for Schooling state:

> ***"Schooling should develop fully the talents and capacities of all students..."***

> ***"Schooling should be socially just, so that... Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have equitable access to, and opportunities in, schooling so that their learning outcomes improve and, over time, match those of other students."***

and that

> ***"Schooling should be socially just, so that... all students understand and acknowledge the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures to Australian society and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians."***

The complete National Goals for Schooling are at Appendix 1 to this Strategy.

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy

In 1989, all States and Territories and the Commonwealth endorsed the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy. For over a decade the Policy has been the focus of efforts to achieve better educational results for Indigenous Australians. The four key themes of the Policy are:

- involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in educational decision-making;
- equality of access to educational services;
- equity of educational participation; and
- achieving equitable and appropriate educational outcomes.

A summary of the 21 goals of the Policy is at ***Appendix 2*** to this Strategy.

Implementation

Achieving the objective of this Strategy will require education providers to adopt systemic changes to act on all of its six Key Elements. To support these systemic changes, the Commonwealth will provide resources under this Strategy for a range of targeted initiatives in a number of pilot communities, in cooperation with the States and Territories.

Cooperative efforts and strong partnerships

Implementing the Key Elements of the Strategy will require a cooperative effort between the Commonwealth, States and Territories, as well as non-government education providers and Indigenous communities, families and parents.

It will require education providers to draw on all their available funding resources and skills. Mainstream funds, from State, Territory and Commonwealth Government programs, as well as special assistance programs will be needed. The changes will have to be made across the education systems, not just in some schools.

It is vital that stronger partnerships are developed between preschools, schools and the families and communities, as well as government agencies. The objectives of this Strategy will not be achieved without these partnerships and the concerted, coordinated action that such partnerships can deliver. Neither the Commonwealth nor any individual State, Territory or education provider can achieve the improvements on their own.

States, Territories and other education providers are already making some of the changes outlined in this Strategy. The Commonwealth expects that all education providers will implement the elements of this Strategy. Success will depend upon all the elements being addressed.

Systemic changes and targeted community initiatives

The Commonwealth will work with education providers to put in place Indigenous literacy, numeracy and attendance implementation plans. These plans will need to clearly describe what education providers will do to achieve the objectives of this Strategy, across all their schools. Specific initiatives will be negotiated with schools and families within communities targeted for assistance under this Strategy, in areas of greatest need to quicken their progress in overcoming the barriers to greater success. These initiatives will be flexible and will respond to the particular needs and characteristics of those communities.

This Strategy offers funding over and above the recurrent, capital and targeted programmes provided by the Commonwealth. Supplementary funding of

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$27 million will be used to support education improvements for Indigenous students in the most disadvantaged areas in a State or Territory.

Strategy Implementation Plans

The implementation plans required by the Commonwealth will include: a description of the education providers' initiatives and strategies to achieve the National Literacy and Numeracy Goals in respect of Indigenous students; details of the specific initiatives to be undertaken under this Strategy across education systems or in particular pilot communities, preschools and schools; rationales for these specific additional initiatives implemented under this Strategy; timeframes for the systemic changes to be achieved and for the specific initiatives in the pilot communities under this Strategy; the performance measures and accountability reporting arrangements that will be used to monitor success of the Strategy in achieving the objective under the National Literacy and Numeracy Goals.

In addition, performance measures will be used for monitoring the aggregated improvements achieved in the pilot schools/communities participating in initiatives specifically funded under this Strategy. Education providers will be accountable to communities and Governments for reporting on levels of literacy, numeracy, school attendance and student retention.

Achieving the National Goals with better targeted funding

All education providers receive substantial funding to achieve the national educational goals for all students, including Indigenous students. This Strategy will only work if education providers more effectively target those State, Territory and Commonwealth resources to ensure that they are effectively used for Indigenous students as for all other students.

Over the period 2001-2004, States and Territories will have available some $57 billion through recurrent funding and financial assistance grants to achieve their educational objectives. The Commonwealth will be providing some $19 billion in general recurrent and capital grants, and a further $2 billion in specific and targeted assistance programmes for literacy, languages, other special needs and quality schooling for all students.

In addition to the mainstream funding arrangements and programs, during 2001-2004 the Commonwealth will be providing supplementary resources of some $1.5 billion to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students. These funds come primarily through the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme and the Indigenous Education Direct Assistance Programme. Detailed performance reports are required each year from the education providers and other organisations receiving these funds.

To specifically support the implementation of this Strategy, the Commonwealth is making available over $27 million to support a range of specific initiatives in a number of particular areas, including targeted urban, rural and remote regions in

States and Territories. These initiatives will hasten the improvement of literacy, numeracy and attendance levels in some of the most disadvantaged areas in the country. However, it is critical to re-emphasise that **the objective of the Strategy will only be achieved by education providers implementing all six elements, across all their schools in urban, rural and remote areas, for all their Indigenous students, using all available resources.**

The Commonwealth intends to introduce more rigorous guidelines for performance monitoring and reporting for its supplementary assistance during the 2001–04 quadrennium funding period. Funding under the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme during 2001–04 will be contingent upon the completion of an implementation plan for this Strategy. The Commonwealth will also expect education providers to give priority to improvements in literacy, numeracy and attendance when undertaking initiatives funded by the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme.

The Six Key Elements

Key Element 1 – Achieving Attendance

The objective of this Key Element

The first step in implementing the Strategy is to increase the attendance rate of Indigenous students through the active support of a greater number of parents of Indigenous students and community members for their children's education. In doing so, the aim is to ensure that students are learning in an environment of positive expectation.

The first fundamental issue that needs to be addressed if we are to achieve improved educational outcomes for Indigenous students is attendance at school. Clearly, students cannot effectively learn if they do not attend school regularly. Attendance levels are significantly lower for Indigenous students across the country.

The national average attendance rate of Indigenous school students is two to three times lower than the corresponding rate for non-Indigenous students. This means that, on average, Indigenous students are missing out on more than a year's schooling in the primary years and more than a year in the secondary years. The proportion of unexplained absences for Indigenous students was significantly higher than for other students, largely because parents of Indigenous students were less likely to provide notes to teachers explaining absences caused by illness. In many States and Territories the attendance levels are far lower in rural and remote areas.

It is vital that students know they are expected to go to school regularly. Students need to be constantly encouraged to attend school. They need to know that their parents highly value the education they are getting and want them to do as well as they possibly can. They need to know that their families and communities expect them to succeed, to develop their talents and skills and become responsible members of their community.

Experience shows that students attend school and learn best where there is a high level of cooperation between parents, families and teachers and other school staff. Such cooperation is most effective when it is firmly based on a shared understanding of the value of education. This cooperation also needs to be built upon the educational goals parents and families have for their children.

In achieving these objectives, the fact must be faced that many adult Indigenous Australians have had less than happy experiences at school. The history of education for Indigenous people has included discrimination, low expectations and neglect. Consequently, the attitudes of Indigenous parents to education can reflect these negative experiences. However, many Indigenous parents understand the importance of the opportunities and benefits they were denied. They have a

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deep commitment to ensuring their children and grandchildren enjoy a positive experience at school so they are equipped to engage in the broader Australian community. Schools need to put in place pro-active strategies to harness this commitment and ensure classrooms and playgrounds are welcoming places, free of harassment and intolerance.

There is data available demonstrating that some Indigenous students and their parents still find school a foreign and uninviting place. One survey, conducted in Victoria in 1995, reportedly asked students what image best described their school. The most common image among Indigenous Year 10 students was 'prison'; 58% in one State school sample and 47% in another described their experience of school in this way.

A common theme emerged from over 80 Strategic Results Projects funded by the Commonwealth over 1998 and 1999 under the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme. The Projects showed that it is essential to build cultural responsiveness and inclusiveness into education delivery practices and classroom learning. Many preschools and schools report that without this cultural element, many Indigenous students are simply not interested in coming to school. Cultural inclusiveness is no guarantee of educational success, but schools and parents need to get students into the classrooms before they can learn.

The Commonwealth-funded Strategic Results Projects have produced many examples of schools and communities whose efforts have improved parents' and students' engagement in schooling. The Commonwealth is distributing the report of the Strategic Results Projects, entitled '***What Works?***'. The report details the results and methods of the Strategic Results Projects conducted over 1998 and 1999. The Commonwealth is also distributing a guide for teachers that offers a practical, easy-to-read summary of the best lessons learnt from hundreds of classrooms around the country.

One example of success is the Richmond Tweed Vocational Education and Training in Schools Project. Through an active partnership between the school, TAFE and local community, support for students was improved and students' expectations about what they could achieve were lifted. Eighty per cent of the Indigenous students participating in the project remained at school and completed the Year 10 school certificate, compared to 58% in the control group. This project saw the first-ever Indigenous entrant into a traineeship in the local community and the first-ever Indigenous youth employed in a local chemist shop.

In summary, this first element of the Strategy recognises that a strong partnership needs to be built between schools and the families of Indigenous students. This partnership must acknowledge the experiences of Indigenous people. It must respond to their needs and aspirations and deliver opportunities to become equal partners in the management of the education process. In turn, Indigenous students must commit to attending school regularly while the whole community contributes to making schooling a success.

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Initiatives under this Key Element of the Strategy

1. Improving attendance levels by engaging parents and the community

Agreed partnerships for improving attendance levels and getting better educational outcomes will be supported under this Strategy. These agreements will be between parents, Indigenous communities, schools and the agencies supporting education improvement in those communities. Such agreements need to be generated by those involved at the local preschool, school and community level.

Local agreements will detail the initiatives to be adopted by parents, communities and education, health and other agencies. Pilots under this Strategy will test how to achieve this greater community ownership of education delivery with a clear emphasis on improving attendance levels and educational outcomes. One approach could be to establish an education trust, administered by the community, to manage some education delivery arrangements. These could include regular performance and financial auditing to ensure greater transparency for the community. Such trusts could extend Indigenous peoples' ability to 'buy in' the education services that best meet their needs and aspirations.

Local agreements will depend on the particular characteristics and priorities of the communities and agencies involved but could include the following:

- Ensuring students attend preschool and school regularly.
- Involving parents and communities in decisions about education planning, delivery and student behaviour management.
- Increasing participation by parents and communities in students' learning.
- Valuing and including students' cultures and languages in classroom learning experiences.
- Assessing and responding to students' hearing and other health needs.
- Using appropriate and effective teaching approaches that deliver relevant and recognised skills to students.
- Providing parents and communities with regular reports on students' progress, talking through problems and issues that need to be addressed.

Local groups will be brought together to initiate the agreement process. Where appropriate in a pilot community, Indigenous parent committees, consultative bodies, parents and citizen groups, as well as businesses and community organisations will be supported by the Commonwealth to establish local-level agreements. The Commonwealth will work with these groups and education providers and provide resources to facilitate the agreement process.

The shape and nature of the relationships established to achieve greater parental and community involvement will differ across the country. In Roebourne/Karratha, Western Australia, one successful model has an extensive degree of leadership from both Indigenous families and local business and industry representatives. In other areas, a greater focus on the role of local Indigenous bodies or Land Councils may be appropriate.

The Commonwealth will also engage groups at a national level to muster assistance in communities to support the agreement processes. Such agencies will include the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation.

2. *Ensuring parents have the skills and confidence to support their children's education.*

There is a need for training for parents in adult literacy skills, to increase their confidence when helping their children to learn. Home-based literacy and numeracy support skills could be provided, as well as knowledge in how schools work, how decisions are made and how parents can get involved in improving their child's learning environment. Equipping parents with counselling skills could also be useful, as some parents have asked for help in talking through their children's resistance to attending school, especially during the more difficult teenage years.

The Commonwealth's Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) programme has been successful in increasing the involvement of Indigenous parents in their children's education. Many ASSPA committees play a role in building positive preschool and school environments. The Commonwealth will improve the programme over the 2001–04 period to better equip these parents to engage schools in their children's education. ASSPA spending priorities will be negotiated as part of local agreements with parents and communities.

3. *Implementing a student tracking and support system*

Indigenous students have higher levels of absenteeism for two key reasons. Many miss school for reasons that are cultural or community based, and are fully sanctioned by the student's parent or guardian. Other students' absences are not authorised in any way. This strategy addresses both types of absence.

This Strategy will support students who are mobile and obtain a better picture of student attendance patterns, through the establishment of comprehensive student tracking and support systems, with the following features:

- Electronic student profiles, to keep track of students' achievements. When a student moves schools, the profile is electronically sent on with them, enabling the next school to quickly fit the student in to class work and arrange any necessary extra support services.
- Support for mobile and 'at risk' students, to better link education support for those students who move between schools.
- Targeted literacy, numeracy and other interventions for mobile and 'at risk' students.
- Indigenous Home/School Liaison Officers whose job is to support families to get their children to school. The officers will work with students who are not attending school and their parents.
- The establishment of 'visiting students' classrooms to cater for those students who visit a community for a short time.

These classrooms could support mobile students' continued attendance at school while not disrupting the students who attend regularly.

Several States and Territories have initiated student tracking systems with some of the features outlined above. Some are setting up customised systems while others are looking at using existing databases in areas such as community health services.

For example, the Education Department of Western Australia's Tracking System Project (funded by the Commonwealth) was designed to identify all student movements across government and non-government schools. The project achieved the re-engagement of 40% of the identified non-attenders. In addition, the list of students whose whereabouts were reported by schools as 'unknown' was reduced by 65%, with 85% of these students actually located in other schools.

The New South Wales Department of Education and Training's Tracking System Project (also funded by the Commonwealth) was a pilot project designed to track mobile Indigenous students in the New South Wales government-school sector. It targeted about 750 Indigenous students (Years 4 - 8) in 76 rural or remote schools. Sixty students in 12 schools were considered 'at risk' and were supported through an intensive literacy support program over three terms. Pre-testing was in February and post-testing in September. Performance information based on selected testing shows that there was substantial improvement in literacy skills.

This Strategy will support the expansion and adoption of comprehensive tracking systems.

4. *Increasing school attendance monitoring and reporting*

The high proportion of unexplained absences in Indigenous student attendance data suggests that there is poor communication between parents and schools about students' attendance patterns. This Strategy will promote better communication by encouraging improved reporting to parents. The pilot schools and communities where specific initiatives under the Strategy are implemented will have attendance monitoring and reporting arrangements.

These arrangements will be locally agreed and may include such things as:

- 'parent patrols' to monitor truancy and encourage students back to school;
- cooperative strategies between parents, school authorities and police to re-engage truants with school activities; and
- reward systems for those who attend school regularly.

Under the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme, system-wide performance indicators that provide clear, consistent and accountable reports of how attendance levels are improving will be adopted. Such reporting will allow schools and families to identify attendance problems and together develop approaches to resolve those problems.

From January 2000, the Commonwealth has tightened the attendance requirements relating to payment of the ABSTUDY living allowance. Students in receipt of ABSTUDY living allowance or Youth Allowance are required to attend the course for which they are enrolled. Students who accumulate

more than five unexplained absences in a school term become subject to breach penalties. In the first instance, those students are required to enter into an agreement with Centrelink that they will attend school. If they breach this agreement, student entitlements will be progressively reduced for this and subsequent breaches.

The Commonwealth will also encourage schools and communities to link parents' financial commitments to attendance-support initiatives. Such initiatives could include nutrition and breakfast programs for students, community-mandated 'penalties' for consistent unexplained school absences and rewards for good attendance. These approaches would be community-based and self-managed. They will need to be unique arrangements, tailored to local community needs.

Some communities are already implementing such approaches, such as in the Yakanarra Community School in Western Australia and in the Alekerange School in the Northern Territory. Some communities in the Cape York area of Queensland have proposed linking portions of welfare payments to school attendance requirements and initiatives. Such proposals will need to be carefully considered by governments in the context of more general policy issues relating to the enforcement of requirements associated with family and welfare benefits.

5. *Greater flexibility in preschool and school organisation to meet Indigenous community cultural and other needs*

School timetables and structures that respond more flexibly to Indigenous students' and community needs will contribute to lifting attendance levels. Such models already exist in parts of the country and respond to local cultural and ceremonial responsibilities as well as regional climates and other factors.

States, Territories and education providers are responsible for fixing the school calendar as well as for negotiating the conditions under which teachers and others are employed. The pilot communities under this Strategy will focus on ensuring schools are as flexible as possible to meet local needs.

6. *Utilising the skills of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education workers to improve attendance levels*

All education systems in Australia now employ Indigenous education assistants or workers. These Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education workers have a variety of roles and responsibilities. In some schools they form a part of the teaching team and are an important link between schools, parents and communities. In others, they are restricted in their range of roles and are sometimes utilised more for administrative support than educational purposes.

This Strategy will promote the strong educational roles that well-trained, effective Indigenous education workers can play.

Many are powerful and accessible role models for students and can be a major influence encouraging students to attend school regularly. The Commonwealth will seek to ensure education systems are maximising the benefits that Indigenous workers can play. In some areas, this could mean addressing issues as simple as ensuring the education workers are able to access appropriate four wheel drive vehicles so they can reach students and families in their homes.

7. *Providing mentoring projects for students, using the skills and leadership of Indigenous Elders and community leaders*

Experience suggests that students who have strong local role models are more likely to retain an interest in continuing in education and building a future pathway for themselves. These role models can be anyone from a range of walks of life, from local Indigenous Elders, to a sports 'star' to a local business person with a keen interest in the community's youth.

Several schools and communities selected for participation in this Strategy will have the opportunity to trial a model for implementing student mentoring projects. The Commonwealth will fund a number of pilot mentor programs in rural and urban settings for students in Years 8 and 9.

These mentoring projects will provide a supportive network in which Indigenous Elders and community members can offer their skills, experiences and encouragement to Indigenous students. It will also give non-Indigenous community and business people the chance to support young Indigenous students.

8. *Providing structured workplace learning opportunities and school-to-work pathways*

Employment opportunities are important incentives for young people to attend school and stay on to the senior secondary years. Some of the more successful pilot schemes are those which include employment commitments by participating businesses and agencies.

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry will work with regional and State/Territory Chambers and local businesses to establish new opportunities for Indigenous secondary students in the participating communities and schools under this Strategy.

The Commonwealth will contract the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry to facilitate partnerships between business, schools and community organisations to deliver several hundred structured workplace opportunities for Indigenous students in Years 9, 10, 11 and 12. The structured workplace opportunities to be delivered under this Strategy will open pathways into private sector businesses for many Indigenous secondary students.

This arrangement will be linked to other school-to-work initiatives being developed by the Commonwealth's Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, State and Territory agencies, and job placement initiatives of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business, and State and Territory agencies.

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It needs to be acknowledged that in many rural and remote communities, there are fewer private sector job opportunities. The opportunities that will be created will be based within the labour market and skill requirements for those communities. Communities will be given the training and basic skills they require.

9. *Adopting best practice teaching methods in classroom activities to lift the expectations of parents, teachers and the students themselves*

When students experience success they want to come back for more. The achievement of good outcomes must be the focus of the various initiatives undertaken across all elements of this Strategy.

This Strategy will promote the use of the most effective teaching practices in preschools and schools. There is now a wide body of knowledge and evidence describing what methods work well. One rich source of evidence for these effective practices is the final report on the Commonwealth's series of Strategic Results Projects funded in 1998 and 1999 under the *Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme*.

Support will be given to preschools and schools to access this knowledge and evidence. This will enable the schools, parents and communities to discuss the most appropriate and effective teaching approaches for their students. Experience shows that when parents, teachers and others set clear, high expectations for students, those students are more likely to attend school regularly and achieve success.

10. *Putting a greater focus on ensuring culturally inclusive approaches to education planning and delivery*

There have been great improvements in the level of culturally inclusive education delivered over the past decade or more. Preschools and schools seeking funding for initiatives under this Strategy will be required to consult with parents and Indigenous communities about the most appropriate and meaningful ways to incorporate Indigenous students' cultures and languages into educational experiences.

Culturally inclusive education practices include:

- using locally relevant teaching contexts and examples when delivering any particular subject or topic;
- involving local Indigenous Elders, adults and learning environments;
- using various teaching styles that cater to the diversity of students' cultural strengths; and
- teaching Indigenous languages.

The way that schools ensure cultural inclusiveness should be developed in partnership with the Indigenous community and should be sensitive to the aspirations and preferences of that community.

Depending on the circumstances in communities and schools, one result may be more Indigenous Elders being brought into classrooms to teach all students about the local history of Indigenous people. It could mean that Indigenous languages are taught. It could mean teaching core subjects from an Indigenous perspective.

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11. *Supporting families and parents to overcome the social problems that make it difficult for them to get involved in their children's education*

Students who are disaffected by their experience of schooling, or struggling to cope with the demands of school, need specific assistance. Personal counselling and one-to-one help will often be needed to support some students in coping with problems out of school, to combat feelings of alienation or failure, to gain remedial assistance, and so on.

The preschool and school-based initiatives under this Strategy will test ways of improving links between communities and government agencies. The Commonwealth will focus on improving the cross-departmental links between government support services.

This initiative will help families acquire the skills and support necessary to help their children cope with social and personal difficulties and succeed at school. Such assistance may include parenting skills support or family counselling from Indigenous community agencies.

Implementation plans will explore the issues and needs that require attention. Government and community family support organisations will be brought into the implementation arrangements as active partners to improve support for parents and families.

Key Element 2 - Overcoming Hearing, Health and Nutrition Problems

The objective of this Key Element

To achieve effective joint action between government agencies and communities to address the health needs of students so that health problems do not impede learning.

Compared to their non-Indigenous peers, there is a high level of significant hearing disability among Indigenous students. This is often due to middle ear infection. Prevalence of middle ear infection in advantaged populations around the world is approximately 5% in childhood, falling to less than 1% after the age of 12. Among Indigenous Australian children, especially those living in remote communities, prevalence of the disease has been found to range from 40% to 70%, with younger children experiencing more frequent episodes.

Many children do not like to admit that they cannot hear properly, or may not be aware of their disability. Hearing aids are often strongly disliked and cause acute embarrassment and shame. Children with the most severe hearing loss may not attend school at all. The learning disabilities associated with poor hearing exacerbate absenteeism, especially among boys.

The health status of children is a powerful influence on their ability to come to school and when at school, on their capacity to learn and fully participate in schooling opportunities. Children who are hungry or deficient in certain nutrients, particularly iron, have diminished concentration and cognitive function. Parasitic infections can cause or aggravate such conditions. Persistent or frequent illness not only reduces the time a child spends at school and sets them back in learning progress but can also be indicative of problems in care and environment that are continuing from early childhood. Hearing and visual limitations must also be assessed and addressed for their impact on learning capacity and the general well-being of a child.

Moreover, in the absence of widespread early childhood or preschool programs, the start of primary school represents the first organised setting in which most children in a community are accessible for delivery of health programs and messages. Schools can thus be an efficient mechanism for targeting and delivering health services. Analyses done by the World Bank suggest that school-based health and nutrition programs rank amongst the most cost-effective public health strategies, second only to immunisation.

Health Screening

Screening children for health problems as they enter school could provide a systematic and immediate assessment of a child's health status – particularly for those conditions that will affect learning. Experience in the Northern Territory has shown this to be an effective way of detecting serious health problems. In one trial of such a program, 774 Aboriginal children from 11 remote communities were screened and rates of anaemia, malnutrition and trachoma were found to be 39%, 22%

and 26% respectively. Nearly one third failed the hearing screening and there were also assessments of urine, visual acuity and for heart conditions.

The utility of a screening program will of course only be as good as the primary health care and other services available to treat and/or otherwise address the conditions detected and their implications in the school and classroom. Thus, any trial of a screening program should be done collaboratively with health and educational services that have the capacity to counsel parents or other carers on home conditions and teachers on school conditions that can redress, treat and accommodate the health conditions diagnosed. Supporting community education processes through school and health services should be incorporated.

One of the Commonwealth-funded Strategic Results Projects focused on improving hearing assessments, interventions and literacy support. The Northern Territory Association of Independent Schools and the Menzies Institute of Health in Darwin received funding for a large-scale project focused on hearing issues for over 1,000 Indigenous students across six schools in both urban and remote locations. The students were generally learning English as a second language. The project provided:

- ear examination and hearing testing;
- a phonological awareness intervention program for students and teachers;
- frequency modulation (FM) classroom hearing aids and classroom sound-field amplification systems; and
- the services of two speech pathologists.

Seventy-nine per cent of students were found to have an educationally significant hearing disability. Some 40% required medical services to treat active middle ear disease or provide reconstructive ear surgery. Sixteen per cent had persistent conductive hearing loss that met the Australian Hearing criteria for being issued with an individual classroom hearing aid. An additional 24% had conductive hearing impairment that did not meet the Australian Hearing criteria for provision of a hearing aid.

Thirty-eight per cent had indications of Central Auditory Processing Disorder – these students can hear but cannot completely understand running speech against a background of noise and competing messages. Classroom acoustics vary but are generally very poor listening environments for students with a hearing disability who are learning English as a second language.

Only 21% of the students participating in the Project attended more than three-quarters of the school days in 1998 and were therefore tested for the results of the literacy support program. It was not possible to assess any primary school children for the impacts of this program because not one attended school for at least 75% of school days in 1998. The mean progress in spelling age scores was 11 months and in writing age scores was 12 months – a significant improvement in areas where progress is usually somewhere in the region of three months reading age improvement per year.

This project demonstrates the need for a coordinated and comprehensive approach to assisting students with educationally significant hearing impairments. Such an approach includes:

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- regular hearing assessments;
- introduction of physical supports in classrooms;
- partnerships with health services to ensure treatment action;
- recognition and use of students' existing techniques to deal with their hearing problems;
- linkages to appropriate literacy methodologies; and
- introduction of effective strategies to address poor attendance.

Nutrition Programs

In addition to the more acute problems of poor nutrition that can be detected through health screening, short term hunger (i.e. children who come to school without breakfast or lunch) will severely limit a child's capacity to concentrate and learn in the classroom setting. Research has shown the physiological effects of short-term fasting affect brain function sufficiently to explain this effect – an effect often manifested through either lethargy or, disruptive behaviour that effects other children in the classroom.

School nutrition programs whether they be breakfast, a mid-morning snack or lunch can be an effective response to this situation where it is widespread within a particular community or environment. Beyond the school-milk programs that were common in Australia in the 1970s there are now examples of more community-based, innovative, feeding programs that can address and be adapted to specific community concerns and conditions. Specific micronutrient deficiencies can be addressed through feeding programs where there is attention to the nutritional quality of the meal or snack. Nutrition and feeding programs have also been shown to have a positive effect on school attendance.

The provision of food in the school environment provides the opportunity to convey health and nutrition messages to children and their families. Linkages with other parts of the curriculum can be made to enforce and build on these messages. Where specific micronutrient deficiencies are prevalent, particularly iron, they should also be the time at which supplements are given. Families can also be involved in the implementation and thus nutrition and health messages are conveyed in an active, participatory, setting.

Initiatives under this Key Element of the Strategy

1. *Introduce effective hearing assessments and interventions linked with literacy and numeracy delivery projects based on best practices from the Strategic Results Projects and other successful models*

The Commonwealth will work with pilot Indigenous communities, Commonwealth, State and Territory health services to ensure that Indigenous students in participating locations receive hearing assessments on entry to preschool and school and then at regular intervals through their school years.

This Strategy will help facilitate cooperation between health agencies and education

providers to support hearing assessments and interventions. This Key Element will give a boost to that process in selected areas. For example, in the top end of the Northern Territory the groundwork has been laid through a Commonwealth-funded Strategic Results Project.

The aim of this element will be to provide students with regular hearing assessments. Specific interventions will be implemented for those that need assistance. Such interventions could include:

- providing physical aids, such as hearing aids in classrooms, FM audio systems or individual hearing supports;
- actively managing referrals and follow-up medical interventions for those needing treatment; and
- helping teachers adopt better classroom teaching techniques to deal with the barriers caused by poor hearing.

This Strategy will also support an expansion of the successful hearing assessment and teaching model from the Northern Territory Association of Independent Schools Strategic Results Project in pilot communities. These initiatives will build in attendance strategies as well as literacy, numeracy and other teaching strategies for students with significant hearing impairments.

2. *Trial, with research support and conditions, health screening programs for primary school children as they enter school*

Trials will be collaborative, community-based initiatives with primary health and education services. Comprehensive evaluation and research analysis plans must be incorporated to assess effectiveness.

3. *Trial of school nutrition programs*

These trials will, through the provision of resources and technical guidance, be community based and implemented and may involve linkages with other community organisations such as health services as well as with local business. The Department of Health will provide $2 million over the next two years to trial nutrition programmes which support the strategy.

4. *Develop and trial nutrition and health communication strategies*

These will link with standard curriculum processes and involve parents and other family members to reinforce and convey messages to the home setting. Health communication and curriculum strategies will also incorporate environmental health messages.

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Key Element 3 – Preschooling Experiences

The objective of this Key Element

To increase the proportion of the Indigenous 3 to 5-year-old population in preschool education and ensure those students are confident and competent to enter primary school.

There is clearly a need to lift the preschool participation levels of Indigenous students. There is also a need to ensure these students get the confidence and skills needed to succeed at primary school.

Research demonstrates that children's participation in early childhood and preschool education is cost-effective in terms of reducing the need for 'catch-up' education programs later in life. It is also risk-reducing, in terms of better equipping children with the social, physical and emotional skills needed to cope effectively with life and learning. Further, it is now clear that the early years in a child's life are critical for the development of intellectual skills and the physical capacities to become ready for school.

It is also apparent that by Year 3 in primary school there are already significant gaps between the literacy levels of Indigenous students and those of other students. In Western Australia, for example, the percentage of Year 3 students achieving the provisional benchmark in reading in 1998 was almost 76% for all students compared to just 33% for Indigenous students.

The number of Indigenous preschool-aged children rose dramatically between 1991 and 1996. However, at the same time, the number in preschool education stayed roughly the same, at around 8,000. Thus, the participation rate dropped from almost 53% to around 41% in 1996; a substantial reduction of about 12%. This compares poorly with the non-Indigenous participation rate of over 53% in 1996. More recent data from the *National Indigenous Preschool Census* indicates Indigenous children's participation rates may have increased over the past several years.

However, there have been several recent examples of successful practices that can be extended to preschool education providers. The South Australian Department of Education's 'First Step: Home to School Transition' Project worked with 60 families to increase preschool participation. The project set out to improve literacy teaching for preschool children by implementing individual learning plans following extensive observation of the children's use of English and their social interactions. Community liaison was also increased. Sound amplification tools were introduced in one site to assist with the effects of otitis media. The results from this project were good, with Indigenous children demonstrating significant increases in oral literacy skills and good increases in speaking and listening skills.

A Strategic Results Project of the New South Wales Department of Education and Training focused on successful transitions from home to school in areas with limited or no preschool access. The project had about 100 preschool-aged children

participating across 10 sites – areas with little if any access to government or other preschools. This project developed an alternative transition program to try to prepare the children for entry into school.

A team-based approach was used. A transition teacher and an Aboriginal education worker were trained in cross-cultural approaches and parents were involved in assessing whether children were ready to enter the program. While there was a wide range of performance levels, generally the Indigenous students who entered school after completing the transition program performed better than non-Indigenous school children in speaking and listening, but not reading and writing. The schools also adopted a health screening system as a result of the transition program, with referrals to health services where required.

Some 92% of children satisfied providers' expectations for entry to kindergarten. The literacy and numeracy skills of 'graduates' from the transition program were better than their non-Indigenous kindergarten peers.

This Strategy aims to assist education providers and parents with educating preschool students. The preparedness for school entry that these students acquire in preschool seems to be an issue. The Commonwealth believes more can be done to ensure that these students leave preschool ready to benefit fully from a primary school education.

Initiatives under this Key Element of the Strategy

1. Working with States and Territories to increase preschool participation levels

The Commonwealth will work collaboratively with States, Territories and key stakeholders to lift the participation levels of Indigenous children in preschool.

The trends in participation patterns need to be carefully analysed, the gaps in participation levels between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children need to be clearly identified, and successful examples of interventions under the Commonwealth-funded Strategic Results Projects and other State and Territory initiatives need to be widely promoted. There is a need to expand those approaches that have led to improved education preparedness for Indigenous preschool children.

In those preschools and communities where specific agreements for action are initiated, the Commonwealth will support the introduction of improved education delivery methods, including those demonstrated through the Strategic Results Projects in 1998 and 1999.

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2. *Getting students ready for school and extending successful preschool teaching practices*

As specific local-level agreements under this Strategy are put in place, the Commonwealth will negotiate the introduction of more effective literacy and numeracy-focused teaching activities with education providers.

This Strategy will also promote a Commonwealth project to create a preschool student development profile. This profile will set out the literacy, numeracy, social, physical and emotional developmental indicators that tell parents and teachers if a student is ready to enter school.

Key Element 4 – Getting Good Teachers

The objective of this Key Element

To facilitate placing the best teachers, suitably skilled and paid, in the areas with the greatest needs – and keeping them there.

Excellent teachers are in demand. Sadly for many remote communities, urban schools and the amenities they offer are usually a more attractive option for teachers and their families, compared with an isolated community.

A good teacher can overcome many of the negative effects caused by the problems and barriers facing Indigenous children. Good teachers can improve students' learning. Conversely, poor teaching clearly sets students back and can actually harm their future learning prospects. The Collins' *Review of Education for Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory* found that there is a huge turnover of teachers in some areas, particularly remote Aboriginal communities. In some more isolated areas of the country, schools have not been able to open at the beginning of the year due to a lack of teachers.

There is too little acceptance of the capacity of Indigenous students to achieve as well as other students, and so Indigenous students are frequently taught in an environment of low expectation. Non-Indigenous teachers can often find it difficult to adopt culturally-inclusive, appropriate and effective approaches with Indigenous students without adequate training and preparation. A recent study of third-year teaching students from Edith Cowan University in Western Australia showed that many of those future teachers thought that Aboriginal students were 'going to be troublesome and difficult to teach'.

It is also hard to expect young graduate teachers to go to distant communities and start applying their skills without adequate personal support, particularly as they are also learning a new culture and sometimes a new language.

The University of Western Sydney estimates that only around half the universities in Australia offer teaching courses that include Aboriginal or Indigenous Studies as a core component.

The Strategic Results Projects demonstrated that with a clear focus and enthusiastic support, teachers could achieve big student improvements in a relatively short time. A consistent theme arising from these projects is that teachers who are interested in their students, and who are supported by good professional development, leadership and expert assistance, do make a major difference to students' achievements.

Initiatives under this Key Element of the Strategy

1. *Improve teachers' preparation and quality by facilitating increased adoption of Indigenous Studies as a core subject in university teacher degree programs*

This Strategy supports a project to document current university best practices in introducing Indigenous Studies as a core subject in teaching degrees. The project will survey teachers who have graduated from degree programs that included an Indigenous Studies subject. The teachers will recount their experiences and views on the benefits of the preparation the subject offered them. The survey will also gather teachers' views on how the subject can be improved. The results of the survey will be documented and made available to universities who have yet to adopt the core subject approach. The results will also assist those universities already providing Indigenous Studies programs to reflect on their current results and how they can improve their programs further.

2. *Improving teacher recruitment, placement and retention approaches*

States and Territories will be encouraged to improve teacher recruitment, placement and retention. Specific approaches to teacher selection could be tested with education systems participating under this Strategy and could include looking at ways to ensure that teachers are supported to stay in communities to build the relationships needed to become really effective.

In the right circumstances and with the State and Territory systems' commitments, a range of possible incentive options could be introduced to attract and retain effective teachers to Indigenous communities and schools with significant proportions of Indigenous students. These incentives might range from direct payments to teachers who work for a certain period of time in such places, to Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS)-related benefits, to future study incentives, or other benefits.

3. *Supporting high quality teaching*

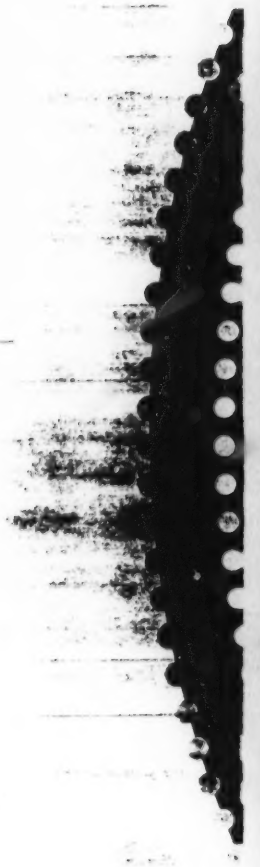
There is a need for retraining of and continuing professional development for teachers working with Indigenous students. State, Territory and other education systems will be encouraged to link their professional development plans under the Commonwealth's Quality Teaching Programme to the specific areas, schools and communities targeted for action under elements of this Strategy. In addition, the Commonwealth will ensure the national Quality Teaching Programme projects include a focus on Indigenous education issues and improvement strategies.

4. *Supporting stronger school leadership*

The Commonwealth will work closely with the Australian Principals' Associations Professional Development Council to more

effectively engage principals in the task of improving Indigenous students' educational outcomes.

This will focus on working with them to continue to improve principals' leadership roles in schools in addressing Indigenous students' disadvantages. The Council's project will encourage principals across all States and Territories to change their schools' culture at a local level in an effort to improve the educational experience for Indigenous students.



Key Element 5 – Using the Best Teaching Methods

The objective of this Key Element

To secure the use in classrooms of teaching methods that have been shown to effectively improve student literacy and numeracy outcomes.

The aim of this element of the Strategy is to achieve widespread recognition and acceptance of methods which have been shown to rapidly and effectively improve literacy and numeracy levels for Indigenous students.

There is no one way of teaching that guarantees success. Many methods can work. This has been clearly shown by the Commonwealth-funded Strategic Results Projects and other State and Territory initiatives. What is essential is a three-pronged approach:

- teaching with a recognition and inclusion of students' cultures and languages;
- participation by parents, communities and students; and
- focusing on skills development that is related to students' real life experiences.

One of the major successes of the Strategic Results Projects is the generation of a sense of positive accomplishment. There are numerous practical examples showing that the barriers can be overcome. There is a momentum for change in many schools, not just the 320 sites where projects were actually implemented. Twelve of the Strategic Results Projects specifically targeted poor English literacy skills. A critical feature of success was that the projects encouraged teachers to have high expectations of their Indigenous students. This was achieved through intensive, focused and thoughtful efforts. Students were encouraged by teachers to achieve national, State or similar literacy achievement levels or benchmarks. In many cases and in light of the high incidence of hearing impairment in some parts of the country, culturally sensitive interventions, both medical and educational, were crucial as a basic starting point in achieving proficiency in English literacy.

A project conducted at both an urban high school and at a remote primary school was designed to accelerate English literacy learning for Indigenous students. A team of teachers, Indigenous education workers and tutors were trained to deliver and promote a range of learning strategies that allowed all students to participate at some level in activities relating to an age appropriate text, rather than the usual remedial reader. In less than a year, the overall average improvement in students' literacy has been from one-and-a-half to more than two levels of the national English profile. In some cases improvements were higher.

Issues relating to literacy need to be addressed in order to achieve improved numeracy levels. The development of Indigenous students' understanding of Standard Australian English as the language of mathematics is crucial for achieving numeracy proficiency.

A number of Strategic Results Projects were specifically undertaken to address poor numeracy skills. A project conducted in a large district school in a remote location was designed to improve the numeracy levels of a target group of Year 3 and 4

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Indigenous students. The target was to have half of the Year 3 students and 80% of the Year 4 students achieve Level 2 of the State Student Outcome statement relating to Number. Seventy per cent of the Year 3 students and 75% of the Year 4 students achieved this target.

Initiatives under this Key Element of the Strategy

1. *Improving teaching practices in literacy and numeracy education*

Specific schools and communities targeted for action under this Strategy will receive support to implement improvements to their teaching methods in literacy and numeracy. They will be supported to explore the numerous models of effective practices and to adopt those that meet their school and community characteristics and needs. Such support could include assistance and training for teachers in current best practice approaches for dealing with the range of practical issues they face every day; for example, how to most effectively teach composite classes or how to most efficiently use curriculum frameworks and develop syllabuses and lesson plans.

Teaching methods that worked under the Strategic Results Projects included:

- providing intensive individual student support;
- using scaffolding literacy practices;
- involving external teams of specialists and Indigenous adults;
- collecting and using students' stories and oral histories in teaching;
- networking key teachers to support each other; and
- using appropriate alternative sites for education delivery.

The final report on the Strategic Results Projects is available to all education sectors and provides extensive analysis of all Projects as well as summaries of key factors in successful delivery. The report shows that comprehensive improvements in literacy and numeracy outcomes can be secured when specific teaching strategies are linked with initiatives to address:

- improved student attendance levels;
- effective tracking of students, especially those who are mobile and 'at risk';
- educationally significant hearing impairments; and
- access to information and communications technologies.

The Commonwealth will support State and Territory initiatives to provide information and communication technologies to assist in delivering more effective literacy and numeracy teaching approaches. The initiatives by States and Territories and other education systems could include improvements to schools' access to information and communication technology systems; provision of personal computers for students; and skilling teachers in more effective use of computer-based teaching approaches.

Where State and Territory systems have in place a clear leadership and planning framework, the Commonwealth will assist teachers to exchange their stories about how to achieve more effective education delivery practices. This will include such measures as a national practitioner's workshop on facilitating good practice education delivery.

Key Element 6 – Measuring Success, Achieving Accountability

The objectives of this Key Element

To measure progress in each of the Key Elements of the Strategy to allow for improved effectiveness and achievement over time.

This year, the assessment of all students' literacy skills against an agreed national benchmark will take place for Year 3 and 5 students. Further work continues in establishing numeracy benchmarks and literacy standards in other years.

Through the National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty First Century in Australia, State and Territory Governments and the Commonwealth agreed to collaborate to increase public confidence in school education, setting explicit and defensible standards through which the effectiveness and equity of schooling can be measured. The national literacy and numeracy benchmarks are the first clear step to deliver these agreements.

Accountability involves the regular collection and reporting of the educational progress and outcomes of students; establishing clear performance measures, data collection procedures and improvement targets; and the provision of regular information to parents, communities, schools and governments on the actual progress and outcomes achieved.

Accountability measures provide the most effective process for identifying where objectives are not being achieved so that timely and effective action can be taken before students' educational opportunities are irreparably damaged.

1. *Improving mainstream programme accountability*

The Commonwealth will ensure that supplementary funding to assist achieving improved educational outcomes for Indigenous students is just that – supplementary to mainstream recurrent and targeted programme resources.

The Commonwealth intends to introduce an enhanced performance monitoring and reporting framework for its supplementary assistance during 2001–04. Funding under the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme for 2001–04 will be contingent upon education systems and providers completing an implementation plan detailing how they will utilise all available relevant State, Territory and Commonwealth financial assistance to achieve the national objectives of this Strategy (that is, the agreed National Goals). The Commonwealth will also expect education providers to give priority to improvements in literacy, numeracy and attendance when undertaking initiatives funded under Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme.

Where performance improvements for Indigenous students are not achieved, the Commonwealth will require more detailed plans to demonstrate that achievement of the goals will be attained. Maintenance of funding and programme arrangements will be contingent on commitment to such plans.

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Appendix 1

The national goals for schooling in Australia in the twenty-first century

The State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers of Education met as the 10th Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) in Adelaide, 22-23 April 1999, chaired by the Minister for Education, Children's Services and Training in South Australia, the Hon Malcolm Buckby MP. Conscious that the schooling of Australia's children is the foundation on which to build our future as a nation, Council agreed to act jointly to assist Australian schools in meeting the challenges of our times. In reaching agreement to address the following areas of common concern, the State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers of Education made an historic commitment to improving Australian Schooling within a framework of national collaboration.

Preamble

Australia's future depends upon each citizen having the necessary knowledge, understanding, skills and values for a productive and rewarding life in an educated, just and open society. High quality schooling is central to achieving this vision.

This statement of national goals for schooling provides broad directions to guide schools and education authorities in securing these outcomes for students. It acknowledges the capacity of all young people to learn, and the role of schooling in developing that capacity. It also acknowledges the role of parents as the first educators of their children and the central role of teachers in the learning process. Schooling provides a foundation for young Australians' intellectual, physical, social, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development. By providing a supportive and nurturing environment, schooling contributes to the development of students' sense of self-worth, enthusiasm for learning and optimism for the future.

Governments set the public policies that foster the pursuit of excellence, enable a diverse range of educational choices and aspirations, safeguard the entitlement of all young people to high quality schooling, promote the economic use of public resources, and uphold the contribution of schooling to a socially cohesive and culturally rich society.

Common and agreed goals for schooling establish a foundation for action among State and Territory governments with their constitutional responsibility for schooling, the Commonwealth, non-government school authorities and all those who seek the best possible educational outcomes for young Australians, to improve the quality of schooling nationally .

The achievement of these common and agreed national goals entails a commitment to collaboration for the purposes of:

- further strengthening schools as learning communities where teachers, students and their families work in partnership with business, industry and the wider community;

- enhancing the status and quality of the teaching profession;
- continuing to develop curriculum and related systems of assessment, accreditation and credentialling that promote quality and are nationally recognised and valued; and
- increasing public confidence in school education through explicit and defensible standards that guide improvement in students' levels of educational achievement and through which the effectiveness, efficiency and equity of schooling can be measured and evaluated.

These national goals provide a basis for investment in schooling to enable all young people to engage effectively with an increasingly complex world. This world will be characterised by advances in information and communication technologies, population diversity arising from international mobility and migration, and complex environmental and social challenges. The achievement of the national goals for schooling will assist young people to contribute to Australia's social, cultural and economic development in local and global contexts. Their achievement will also assist young people to develop a disposition towards learning throughout their lives so that they can exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens of Australia.

Goals

1. **Schooling should develop fully the talents and capacities of all students. In particular, when students leave school, they should:**

1.1 have the capacity for, and skills in, analysis and problem solving and the ability to communicate ideas and information, to plan and organise activities, and to collaborate with others.

1.2 have qualities of self-confidence, optimism, high self-esteem, and a commitment to personal excellence as a basis for their potential life roles as family, community and workforce members.

1.3 have the capacity to exercise judgement and responsibility in matters of morality, ethics and social justice, and the capacity to make sense of their world, to think about how things got to be the way they are, to make rational and informed decisions about their own lives, and to accept responsibility for their own actions.

1.4 be active and informed citizens with an understanding and appreciation of Australia's system of government and civic life.

1.5 have employment related skills and an understanding of the work environment, career options and pathways as a foundation for, and positive attitudes towards, vocational education and training, further education, employment and life-long learning.

1.6 be confident, creative and productive users of new technologies, particularly information and communication technologies, and understand the impact of those technologies on society.

1.7 have an understanding of, and concern for, stewardship of the natural environment, and the knowledge and skills to contribute to ecologically sustainable development.

1.8 have the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to establish and maintain a healthy lifestyle, and for the creative and satisfying use of leisure time.

2. In terms of curriculum, students should have:

2.1 attained high standards of knowledge, skills and understanding through a comprehensive and balanced curriculum in the compulsory years of schooling encompassing the agreed eight key learning areas:

- the arts;
- English;
- health and physical education;
- languages other than English;
- mathematics;
- science;
- studies of society and environment; and
- technology.

and the interrelationships between them.

2.2 attained the skills of numeracy and English literacy; such that, every student should be numerate, able to read, write, spell and communicate at an appropriate level.

2.3 participated in programs of vocational learning during the compulsory years and have had access to vocational education and training programs as part of their senior secondary studies.

2.4 participated in programs and activities which foster and develop enterprise skills, including those skills which will allow them maximum flexibility and adaptability in the future.

3. Schooling should be socially just, so that:

3.1 students' outcomes from schooling are free from the effects of negative forms of discrimination based on sex, language, culture and ethnicity, religion or disability; and of differences arising from students' socio-economic background or geographic location.

3.2 the learning outcomes of educationally disadvantaged students improve and, over time, match those of other students.

3.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have equitable access to, and opportunities in, schooling so that their learning outcomes improve and, over time, match those of other students.

3.4 all students understand and acknowledge the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures to Australian society and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

3.5 all students understand and acknowledge the value of cultural and linguistic diversity, and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, such diversity in the Australian community and internationally.

3.6 all students have access to the high quality education necessary to enable the completion of school education to Year 12 or its vocational equivalent and that provides clear and recognised pathways to employment and further education and training.

Appendix 2

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education policy (AEP) 21 national goals

Involvement of Aboriginal people in educational decision-making

Goal 1 To establish effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal parents and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of pre-school, primary and secondary education services for their children.

Goal 2 To increase the number of Aboriginal people employed as educational administrators, teachers, curriculum advisers, teachers assistants, home-school liaison officers and other education workers, including community people engaged in teaching of Aboriginal culture, history and contemporary society, and Aboriginal languages.

Goal 3 To establish effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal students and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of post-school education services, including technical and further education colleges and higher education institutions.

Goal 4 To increase the number of Aboriginal people employed as administrators, teachers, researchers and student services officers in technical and further education colleges and higher education institutions.

Goal 5 To provide education and training services to develop the skills of Aboriginal people to participate in educational decision-making.

Goal 6 To develop arrangements for the provision of independent advice for Aboriginal communities regarding educational decisions at regional, State, Territory and National levels.

Equality of access to educational services

Goal 7 To ensure that Aboriginal children of pre-primary school age have access to pre-school services on a basis comparable to that available to other Australian children of the same age.

Goal 8 To ensure that all Aboriginal children have local access to primary and secondary schooling.

Goal 9 To ensure equitable access for Aboriginal people to post-compulsory secondary schooling, to technical and further education, and higher education.

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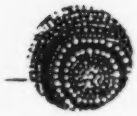
Equity of educational participation



Goal 10 To achieve the participation of Aboriginal children in pre-school education for a period similar to that for all Australian children.

Goal 11 To achieve the participation of all Aboriginal children in compulsory schooling.

Goal 12 To achieve the participation of Aboriginal people in post-compulsory secondary education, in technical and further education, and in higher education, at rates commensurate with those of all Australians in those sectors.

Equitable and appropriate educational outcomes

Goal 13 To provide adequate preparation of Aboriginal children through pre-school education for the schooling years ahead.

Goal 14 To enable Aboriginal attainment of skills to the same standard as other Australian students throughout the compulsory schooling years.

Goal 15 To enable Aboriginal students to attain the successful completion of Year 12 or equivalent at the same rates as for other Australian students.

Goal 16 To enable Aboriginal students to attain the same graduation rates from award courses in technical and further education, and in higher education, as for other Australians.

Goal 17 To develop programs to support the maintenance and continued use of Aboriginal languages.

Goal 18 To provide community education services which enable Aboriginal people to develop the skills to manage the development of their communities.

Goal 19 To enable the attainment of proficiency in English language and numeracy competencies by Aboriginal adults with limited or no educational experience.

Goal 20 To enable Aboriginal students at all levels of education to have an appreciation of their history, cultures and identity.

Goal 21 To provide all Australian students with an understanding of and respect for Aboriginal traditional and contemporary cultures.

Department of Education,
Training and Youth Affairs

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